

Covenants with Allah: Keystone of Islam

NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2026,
256 PAGES.

HALIM RANE AND IBRAHIM ZEIN

In an era marked by the decay of international trust, systemic injustice, and state violence, Halim Rane and Ibrahim Zein's new book *Covenants with Allah* is a timely and necessary intervention. The authors draw our attention to the Qur'anic and Prophetic concepts of covenant (*'ahd* and *mīthāq*) and frame them as fundamental to both the spiritual core of Islam and its governance ethics. Through rigorous methodology and theological depth, the book offers a compelling framework for viewing Islam as an entity grounded in a covenantal tradition of mutual responsibility, justice, human dignity, and accountability.

Across eight chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion, *Covenants with Allah* unfolds in a carefully constructed arc—beginning with the Qur'anic depiction of divine-human relations in primordial covenants to the use of covenants in historical peace-keeping, and finally to modern-day applications of covenantal ethics in a fractured global order as we see today. The first three chapters lay the theological foundation,

beginning with how Allah places the primordial covenant at the center of his expectations from humanity. Rane and Zein highlight how Allah places the Earth as a site of ethical stewardship, with human beings bearing the sacred responsibility as *khulafā'* under divine terms. Satan's refusal to prostrate to Adam is understood not only as an act of arrogance but as the inception of supremacist logic—a form of structural injustice, a breach of divine trust. The authors show that covenants can function as a tool to regulate free will, offering a structure that spans the self, society, and global community. These chapters convince the reader that the roots of social injustice stem not merely from flawed political structures but from the *breakdown of trust and covenant*, a theme which the Qur'an consistently associates with *fasād*—corruption and chaos. As such, covenantal violation is not just immoral—it is cosmically destabilizing.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Rane and Zein carry the covenantal paradigm into the time of the Prophet Muhammad and beyond, portraying his leadership as rooted in promise-keeping and treaty-centered administration rather than authoritarianism. Treaties like the Compact of Medina and the Covenant with the Monks of Sinai are not shown as exceptions to a political rule or peripheral acts of diplomacy, but represent the core of Islamic governance ethics. By illustrating how the later rulers, such as the Fatimids and Ottomans rejuvenated and institutionalized the Prophet Muhammad's covenants—despite imperial temptations to disregard them—the book provides historical legitimacy for governance powered by covenants as a continuing tradition, not a lost ideal. In this view, warfare is not a tool of statecraft meant to protect a state, or seek religious dominance; it is the Qur'anic response to the violation of covenants, not disbelief. This marks a departure from conventional *jus ad bellum* paradigms, as instead of grounding the rationale and legitimacy of war in self-defense, national interest or sovereignty of the state, this paradigm restructures the ethics of war around moral rupture—when covenants and treaties are broken. The book also corrects the common misunderstanding that Islam spread by military might, showing instead that the Prophet's practice of diplomacy and protection through covenants governed dynamics even with those outside the Muslim community. This

reorientation challenges both Islamophobic narratives that assume Islam as inherently militant, along with the assumptions that equate revival of Islam and well-being of Muslims with political domination.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the authors extends the covenantal lens beyond history or theology into a rather urgent crisis of the present: settler-colonialism, indigenous dispossession, and especially the moral collapse pertaining to the Israel-Palestine conflict. In Chapter 8, the “Covenant of a Just Peace” is a bold proposal that paves the way forward not in the sterile language of geopolitical calculus but in the Prophetic model of ethically grounded, trust-based coexistence. Here, *covenant* re-surfaces not only as a spiritual relic of the past but as a living political and diplomatic tool of resistance, moral repair, and collective healing. By proposing a “Covenant of a Just Peace,” the book offers not just critique but the very imagination of spiritually anchored peace and justice itself.

The final chapter synthesizes the theology, history, and present-day urgency into a profound theory of covenants in Islam. Drawing from the Qur’an, the prophetic model of conducting communal affairs, and centuries of revival and neglect, Rane and Zein reintroduce the position of covenants not as conceptual metaphor or an abstract philosophy but as a living experience and a guide for revitalizing Islamic thought, rebuilding interfaith trust and clarifying the role of Muslims in a broken world where justice and order languish in crisis.

What elevates this book beyond historical analysis to a paradigm-shifting intervention is its grounding in a theological foundation. Since the covenant is the medium through which Allah initiates and sustains His relationship with human beings, one may reasonably deduce that covenants, including pacts, promises, and treaties, can be understood as divinely authorized frameworks for maintaining human relationships across diverse communities, nations, and faiths. This grants moral and theological legitimacy to covenantal diplomacy and inter-communal ethics. This work also creates space to reconceptualize Islamic history not through the conventional lens of political succession—marked by caliphates, dynasties, empires—rather through the chronology of covenants: divine-human pact, prophets’ treaties, and inter-communal

accords. While this may not be the book's stated objective, its chapter progression—starting from the primordial covenant and ending with the proposed “Covenant of a Just Peace”—sketches a narrative arc that centers *binding commitment* over shifts in political power. In light of this, covenants emerge not only as theological constructs but as functional, portable, and decentralized models of governance for diverse and ever-evolving communities to undertake the formidable task of repairing a fractured world.

Another more nuanced insight that can be taken from the book is that the covenantal paradigm offers a reevaluation of the assumed centrality of the modern nation-state within Muslim political thought, a presumption that has often gone unchallenged. While Rane situates his thesis within the context of reforming the rules-based international order and improving governance using covenantal ethics in general, the broader implications and utility of his argument suggest that several core Islamic Institutions, such as Zakat, education, Waqf, and communal courts, have demonstrated resilience and effectiveness even in the absence of centralized state control. Instead of a structural overhaul at the macro-level, the covenantal model can serve as a complementary framework for harboring community-led, principled systems of care and accountability.

Building further on this, the modern state, more specifically in postcolonial contexts, may appear less as a neutral vessel and more as a legacy of centralized control. Its interventionist tendencies have often contributed to the distortion of Islamic values, harboring a mistaken association of Islam with authoritarian governance. As the book *Covenants with Allah* delineates, the historical spread of Islam was not a natural consequence of centralized statehood, but a byproduct of relational ethics, trust, ties, and treaties. Therefore, covenantal ethic cannot be reduced to a historical relic but is a pragmatic framework. One that is capable of restoring community autonomy and moral coherence beyond state-centric ideals.

In conclusion, *Covenants with Allah* stands as a defining contribution that not only gives life to a largely overlooked dimension of

Islamic thought and history but also opens new horizons for theological, political, and institutional renewal. It invites its reader to think beyond inherited paradigms and to reengage with the Qur'an's emphasis on mutual accountability, sacred trust, and social justice. In a world worn out of broken states and broken promises, this work reminds us that the most enduring systems of coexistence were never forged in war rooms nor shaped by force or dominance—they were written in covenants.

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